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News Release

ANTIQUE STORES TARGETED IN PROBE INVOLVING SUSPECTED IMMIGRATION, FINANCIAL AND ENDANGERED SPECIES VIOLATIONS *Agents execute 11 search warrants and arrest 29 illegal alien workers*

SAN FRANCISCO – More than 150 agents from four federal agencies executed search warrants today targeting a string of antique stores in the Union Square and Fisherman’s Wharf neighborhoods, seizing records and arresting 29 foreign nationals illegally employed by the businesses.

In a methodical operation lasting several hours, agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) conducted searches at eight antique stores, two warehouses and a portion of a residence. According to documents filed with the court and unsealed at the time of the warrants, the 11 search locations were all in San Francisco and included the King’s Fine Arts and Antiques retail store at 51 Jefferson Street and the nearby showroom; Lloyd’s Fine Art and Jewelry at 229 Jefferson Street; the Regal Collection at 101 Jefferson Street; Gioia Fine Art at 238 Stockton Street; and Gallery De Bellagio at 236 Powell Street.

The undocumented workers from various countries were taken into custody at the stores where they were employed as sales people, warehousemen and stockers. Agents are investigating the use of fraudulent immigration documents and Social Security cards for employment purposes. During today’s searches, federal agents seized records and documents in accordance with the court-issued warrant. The items seized will be reviewed as part of an ongoing investigation into a wide range of federal violations, including immigration violations.

“As this investigation goes forward, ICE will be looking at whether anyone used subterfuge in an attempt to conceal the illegal immigration status of these workers,” said Cyle Vandever, assistant special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in San Francisco. “ICE will not hesitate to seek criminal charges against employers who willfully and egregiously violate our nation’s hiring laws.”

According to IRS-CI Special Agent in Charge Roger L. Wirth, “IRS Criminal Investigation is happy to bring our financial investigative expertise to the table in working with our law enforcement partners in this multi-agency effort which is presently an on-going investigation. All too often, financial crimes go hand in hand with tax evasion and money laundering violations.”

Paul Chang, Special Agent in Charge of Law Enforcement for the Pacific Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said his agency is investigating whether federal wildlife laws have been broken. “While most wildlife trade is legal, significant illegal trade occurs and feeds a black market that encourages poaching of rare species, some of which are threatened with extinction. Our job is to protect those species and ensure that the laws regulating their importation and sale are being followed.”

According to the unsealed court documents filed in connection with today’s searches, the investigation concerns an array of alleged federal violations including Illegal Employment of Aliens, Money Laundering, Mail and Wire Fraud, Removal of Country of Origin Markers, Illegal Ivory Imports and Document Fraud. The case is being investigated by the IRS-CI, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the FBI and ICE.

People with information that may be helpful to the investigation are asked to send an email to Antiques@ci.irs.gov

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